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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 003132

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR WHA, WHA/CCA, AND WHA/CEN
STATE FOR INR, S/CT, DS/ICI/ITA, AND PRM
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [ETTC](#) [PINR](#) [SMIG](#) [ASEC](#) [HO](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: (S) HONDURAS HAS MANY CUBAN DOCTORS; MADURO
CONCERNED OVER INTELLIGENCE WORK BUT NO GOH PLANS TO
CURTAIL GOC ASSISTANCE

REF: A. PIERCE/FISK E-MAIL NOVEMBER

[1](#)B. TEGUCIGALPA 3076

[1](#)C. STATE 205386 (ALL NOTAL)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: There are approximately 100-225 Cuban doctors and nurses in Honduras. A bilateral treaty between the GOH and the GOC governs the program. In addition, there are approximately 500 Hondurans studying medicine in Cuba on GOC scholarships. President Ricardo Maduro told Ambassador November 12 that he was very concerned with the intelligence activities of the Cuban Medical Brigade, and that he was not aware of any immediate plans to accept the Cuban nomination of Dr. Elis Alberto Gonzalez Polanco, Chief of the Cuban Medical Brigade, as the first Cuban Ambassador to Honduras. Nevertheless, the GOH is not likely to curtail any of its medical assistance programs with Cuba. End Summary.

Cuban Doctors and Nurses in Honduras

[1](#)2. (U) PolOff delivered reftel C demarche on Cuban doctors November 5 to MFA DG for Foreign Policy AMB Mario Fortin. PolOff emphasized talking points about the disadvantages of accepting Cuban doctors. PolOff also gave Fortin detailed information on USAID and Peace Corps health projects in Honduras, which are substantial.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Fortin told PolOff that the GOH had a bilateral treaty with the GOC governing the Cuban Medical Brigades program in Honduras. Note: USAID has asked the Ministry of Health for a copy of the treaty, which Post will fax to WHA/CEN and WHA/CCA if a copy is obtained. End Note. Fortin said that the GOH sets the total numbers of doctors the Cubans can bring to Honduras and decides where the doctors go. Typically the Cuban doctors are sent to rural areas or other hard-to-staff areas where Honduran doctors do not want to go. Note: PolOff and ConOff briefly met a Cuban doctor at the National Mental Hospital during a joint CONS/POL tour of the facility. End Note.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Fortin estimated there are approximately 100 Cuban doctors in Honduras. USAID estimates that there are approximately 227 Cuban doctors and nurses in Honduras at any given time, and that approximately one-third of the Cubans are women. Fortin said that the Cuban doctors must return to Cuba when their six-month stay was complete. He said there had not been any requests for political asylum or any other problems. USAID has learned that 20 of the Cuban doctors/nurses have asked to stay in Honduras. Fortin said that the GOH does not pay the doctors salaries, but does pay a small amount (approximately USD 75/doctor) via PAHO to the doctors.

[1](#)5. (C) Fortin claimed that the GOC had not used the assistance by the doctors to try to get GOH support for Cuba in multilateral fora.

[1](#)6. (S) President Ricardo Maduro told Ambassador November 12 that he was very concerned with the intelligence activities of the Cuban Medical Brigade in Honduras, saying that he was convinced they were up to mischief (ref A). In addition, Maduro said that he was not aware of any immediate plans to accept the Cuban nomination of Dr. Elis Alberto Gonzalez Polanco, Chief of the Cuban Medical Brigade, as the first Cuban Ambassador to Honduras since the GOH normalized diplomatic relations with Cuba January 26, 2002 (see ref B for more information on that issue). Maduro reiterated that he was in no hurry to act on this issue and promised Ambassador that he would consult with the Embassy prior to any announcement of the acceptance of a Cuban ambassador. Maduro said that he would look very closely at the proposed candidate's background to assure that it was not problematic in terms of unacceptable activities, including human rights violations.

Honduran Med Students in Cuba; Cuban Professors in Honduras

[1](#)7. (SBU) In addition, Fortin said there are approximately 500

Hondurans currently studying medicine in Cuba on GOC scholarships, with 100 starting each year. Fortin said that several private universities also have agreements directly with the GOC to bring Cuban professors to Honduras to teach. He said that the professors are paid approximately USD 200/month directly, not via the GOC, for a period of six months to one year. He said there had not been any problems or requests for political asylum from the professors. Post also notes that Minister of Public Health Elias Lizardo has traveled to Cuba a couple times in 2002 and that some Hondurans travel to Cuba for medical treatment.

GTMO Cubans and Rafterers

18. (SBU) Fortin said that the lack of problems with the Cuban doctors and professors was in contrast to the Cubans who came to Honduras from Guantanamo. Of the twelve families, Fortin said that most had left Honduras, with the majority of those going to Mexico or the U.S. illegally. He termed the program a complete failure. In an unrelated meeting with International Organization of Migration (IOM) official Norberto Giron November 13, Giron told PolOff that to the best of IOM's knowledge all of the Cubans resettled from Guantanamo had left Honduras illegally for either Mexico or the U.S. Fortin also told PolOff that in the past a small number of rafters have arrived on the Caribbean coast of Honduras and have been granted political asylum.

Honduras Willing to Accept Cuban Doctors Despite Negatives

19. (S) Comment: It is apparent to Post that the GOH is not likely to curtail any of its medical assistance programs with Cuba. As a poor, developing country with a limited public health system, the GOH is unlikely to turn down any offers of assistance, even when aspects of the program concern the president himself. Post is pleased to note President Maduro's hesitancy in moving forward on the Cubans' nomination of Polanco for ambassador. Post expects that Maduro will stick to his promise to Ambassador to consult with the Embassy before making any announcement on a Cuban ambassador. Post is hopeful that Maduro will either continue to delay a decision or reject Polanco's nomination outright. End Comment.

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